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## **Senate passes legislation lifting ban on scholarships for religious studies**

**Lansing** – A package of bills making college theology, divinity and religious education majors eligible for scholarships or grant money from the state of Michigan passed the Senate today, Sen. Jud Gilbert (R-Algonac) announced.

The seven-bill, bi-partisan sponsored package was introduced last year to end the practice of discrimination against certain types of academic study.

“This legislation is designed to give equal opportunity to all students who wish to obtain a college degree,” Gilbert said. “Students should not be penalized for their choice of study, instead, they should be rewarded monetarily for continuing their education.”

Michigan resident Teresa Becker is a student who does not have equal access to the more than \$242 million awarded yearly to students in grants and scholarships because she chose to study theology.

Becker filed a lawsuit against the state last year when her scholarship was rescinded based on her major of study. Federal District Judge George Caram Steeh ruled the state is prohibited from enforcing the statute preventing her from receiving scholarship money.

The legislation would affect five main programs: The Michigan Legislative Award, the Michigan Educational Opportunity Grant, the Michigan Competitive Scholarship, the Part-time Independent Student Grant, and the state’s Tuition Grant programs.

Changing the law also would help the state avoid future potential law suits, as the current language can be deemed a violation of Article I, Sec. 4 of the State Constitution.

“I fully support this legislation because it will allow more support for students who go on to college,” Gilbert said. “Higher education is a great experience and no student should be denied financial aid because they choose religion as their field of study.”

Senate Bills 625-629, and 661 and 662 now go to the House of Representatives for a vote.

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